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Wind and Blue Water

Laura Armistead Carter

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WIND AND BLUE WATER

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LAURA ARMISTEAD CARTER

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DEDICATION

Once, long ago, I journeyed weary days
Adown a Tropic river; overhead
The sun beat down, and from the glassy face
Of the great stream beat up again, 'til heat
Grew visible and quivered 'neath the eyes.
Mile after mile the great trees stretched along
The endless banks and all the space between
Was choked with jungle; 'til the night that hung
Like a great cloud-wave, suddenly rolled down,
Windless and black, and smothered up the world!
Yea! I have stretched my hand to push it back —
So tangible it seemed! so thick! so still!
An even wished for day!—
And then—at length—
A miracle! And dawn rose o'er the sea!

Oh! great, wide, wondrous stretch of heaving blue!
Sparkle and space and color and fresh winds!—
The soul is drunk with rapture, the worn frame
Dazed at the measure of its comforting!

So, in the midst of many weary days
And nights monotonous with grief and pain,
Thinking on thee—to great deeds dedicate!—
The bricks and mortar of the jungle here,

Between whose banks I've journeyed—ah, so long!—
Fall noiseless, and before my wet-lashed eyes,
Dimpling and sparkling in a wondrous light,
Stirred by the very Breath of Life—Again
The Miracle! *So art thou to my soul*
Wind and blue water!

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WIND AND BLUE WATER

WINGS OF FLIGHT

You take me, Love, to your hearth in vain,
  Where the sap in the yule-log sings,
For the White Bird still in my breast doth reign
  And I feel the stir of its wings!
Ah! Love, my Love! I will still the bird
  As long as ever I may,
But the call for flight will at last be heard
  And at last I must up and away!

In vain you clasp me with tender care—
  Though my heart 'gainst your heart beats fast—
For the Wild Things cry in the upper air,
  And how can the earth-home last?
Ah! Love, my Love! I will love you true
  A week, or a month, or a day,
But the broad white wings are too strong for you
  And at last they will bear me away!

Ah! how can I tell you, who cannot fly,
  Of the swoop through the azure clear,
Or the plunge in the black where the bolts shoot by,
  And the freedom that knows not fear?
Yet—once each year in my realms of space,
  When the rising carol rings,

I would barter all for a sheltered place,
  Where the sap in the yule-log sings!

And perchance as you list to the wint'ry blast—
  And One sits where I sit tonight—
A snow-white bird will go drifting past
  By your window's rosy light;
Ah! Love, my Love! do you hear the cry,
  That the bristling watch-dogs mark?
'Tis the heart that you loved in the days gone by,
  That is here—that is lost in the dark!

SONG OF THE POTTER

You are a Child of the Stars,
  I am a Moulder of Clay—
Stuff, when its moment is o'er,
  Shattered and carted away.

Fain would I follow afar—
  Taking what Fortune allots—
O'er the bright pathway you tread,
  But—there is need of my pots!

Simple the village and poor—
  Many the tricks of the trade!—
Scarce could they find other ware
  Honest and faithfully made.

So—I return to my pots!
  Mingles a tear with the clay?
Lo! the hot breath of the kiln
  Straightly hath dried it away.

Whiles the heart follows thee still:
  Whiles the hand raiseth the bars:
Have I done well or done ill?—
  Answer me! Child of the Stars!

"TO THE CHIEF MUSICIAN"

The King speaketh:

Since on the morrow I must walk with Death
And face anew th' embattled Hosts of Fear—
Bring Heaven near to-night! Nay! I would have
Nor woman's voice—nor child's— I do not seek
Peace and forgetfulness—*I seek a sword!*

Open the Gates! Thou hast the countersign!
Speakest their tongue! Throw out a vibrant span
Of kindred harmony across the Void
And link the distant spheres—'til up the path
Of glorious sound my soul ascended stands
Upon the Threshold: 'til my trancéd eyes
Behold the lambent clouds of glory pierced
With tips of countless pinions, tier on tier,
Great pinions strong for flight!—They stir, and lo!
The clouds wave, break and slowly roll away,
While from behind them, white and terrible,
Blazes a light to dim ten thousand suns,
And Heaven's arméd forces stand revealed
In dazzling harness! Every radiant brow
Shaded with steel: and every mighty hand,
Steel gauntleted!—Behold the Heaven I seek!

These have known Deeds and Effort! These, who erst,
"Loved not their lives unto the death" and wrung
No unscarred triumph from the Hosts of Night
Relight the battle-flame—*war comrades these!*

Darkness!
The Gates swing slowly back in place:
The glorious Vision fades: Yet faint, remote,
A silver trumpet! Still they call to arms!
Heaven's still on guard!
Now let the morrow come!
I have my sword!

NIGHT

Ah! lay aside the motley—it is night,
And soft and bright
The quiet stars look down in peaceful splendor,
No more we need dissemble nor remember,
The cap and bauble put away with care—
'Tis for to-morrow's wear—
Now it is night!

Ah! lay aside th' expected smile—'tis night!—
Without affright
Let the pent tears, the friendly dark enfolding,
Fall unrestrained, since there is none beholding,
Eyes must be bright when morning comes again,
But now it eases pain,
And it is night!

And when at last we sink to rest at night—
In pain's despite—
One boon we crave before thy poppy portals—
O Sleepy-God!—one boon for weary mortals:
Ah! send—there is so much that doth perplex us!—
No dreams to vex us—
No dreams at night!

LA PARESSEUSE

My father gives me books to read,
  My mother sets me seams to sew;
Of housewife's skill there is great need—
  And there's so much I do not know!
There's knowledge in the printed page,
  There's credit for the finished seams,
Yet though my tasks I thus can gauge
  What *can* I show them for my dreams?

Dim figures in a tapestry
  The gracious visions come and go,
Faint sounds of far off revelry,
  Soft murmured words of love or woe!
Far off Her azure robe I see,
  Far off His mail of silver gleams,
Too sweet and faint for poesie
  The Shadow-folk who throng my dreams!

Whiles on a half-formed parapet,
  All in a trance, my arms I lean,
High o'er the mist-hung river set,
  Which, erstwhiles lifting, shows its sheen,

And, stately moving past the shore,
A galleon's painted canvas gleams—
The mist rolls over it once more—
My Treasure Ship!—My Barque o' Dreams!

And whiles I lay me on the grass
And hear the song the Silence sings,
And watch the swift-foot Hours pass,
And dimly feel the Heart o' Things;
And half-felt hopes make bright mine eyes,
'Til half-formed tears have quenched their beams,
As sweet and faint the daylight dies,
And twilight clothes the Land o' Dreams.

My father gives me books to read,
My mother sets me seams to sew;
Of housewife's skill there is great need—
And there's so much I do not know!
There's knowledge in the printed page,
There's credit for the finished seams,
Yet though my tasks I thus can gauge
What can I show them for my dreams?

THE CHIEF MOURNER

While others wept about the shrouded bier,
Dry-eyed I stood. In silence and in fear
They eyed me, who had seen the outward show
Nor knew the shame and grief that writhed below!
The double burden borne for weary years,
The useless pleadings and the hopeless tears,
The nightly vigil, while I strove with pain
To patch his tattered honor once again
E'er day should show the havoc!—Now at length
Was *peace!* Why should I mourn because my strength
Had failed not to the end? How could I weep
While gazing on his calm, untroubled sleep?
I thought on what the future must have been,
And I was *glad* that Death had come between—
The whiles they watched and pitied!—But, at last,
When I thought ev'ry feeling had been past,
I knew my loss!—Unthinking, selfish, blind,
No single hallowed mem'ry left behind—!
I looked and mourned for that I could not grieve!
Thought on his Sentence that was my Reprieve—
Then flung me down beside the quiet dead
Weeping, because I had no tears to shed!

LOVE'S EPITAPH

Let us write the epitaph,
Sitting side by side.
Once across the threshold there,
Lips upon her yellow hair—
Nay, unto this very chair!—
Glad you led a bride.
Here we'll write the epitaph—
Sing the Love that died!

Slow the Spirit pined away—
All untended sped—
Mirth and revel drowned his sighs,
'Til aweary, eyes met eyes,
And a shock of dull surprise
Told us he was dead!
"Love's immortal!"—Poets' lies!—
We have seen him—dead!

So we write the epitaph
In the purple gloom;
Custom's kiss and Custom's smile
Scatter cambric flowers, the while
That the World we still beguile
Praises their perfume!
So we write the epitaph
In the dark'ning room.

DAFFODIL AND COLUMBINE

Daffodil and columbine
Twined I for a Love o' Mine.
"These be simple flowers," she said,
"Most unmeet for gentle head!"
Columbine and daffodil,
Truth to tell, she used ye ill!

Beaten gold and ruby red
Forged I in a crown instead.
Pale she grew the gold beneath:
"Oh! alas! my vanished wreath!"
Ruby red and beaten gold—
Bleeding heart 'neath purple fold!

THE MOMENT

Could you live each day for this—
  As ever each day I do—
That Moment of anguish and of bliss,
  When at last I can think of you?

Through the stress of my work each day
  I press to my evening goal—
Oh! Wave of mingled Bitter and Sweet
  When the thought of you floods my soul!

Ah! what can you know of this hour,
  Or how can I e'er declare
The *ache* of the empty arms of a man,
  Or the heart that has found you fair?

Child, Woman or Spirit—come!
  And lay your head on my breast,
Let me bend my face o'er your dusky hair
  'Til the ache in my throat finds rest!

Child, Woman or Spirit—come!
  And lay your hand on my heart,
Bid it cease to throb for a moment's space
  And then, if thou wilt—depart!

For with hurry and stress and strife
The morrow draws on apace,
E'er my Moment flies, let me rest my eyes
On the Sweetness, that is your face!

So shall I greet the Morn
With strength of a man renewed,
And with naught but Toil and The Moment mine,
I yet shall declare Life good!

I HEARD YOU KNOCKING

I heard you knocking, knocking at my door,
Yet stopped to tie a riband in my hair,
And wave adieu to sweet, shy Fancies e'er
I opened on Fulfillment,
But, alas!
Though radiant, tremulous before the glass
I did but pause a moment: though—I swear!—
I lingered just one heart-beat on the stair—
Fearful of so much joy!—You turned away:
"She cannot love if she can thus delay!"

* * * *

And now you stand no more before my door—
Ah me! Had you but knocked a moment more!

LIFE AND THE WOMAN

Now the time had come for Life and the Woman to part. "At last!" she cried, as the cross-roads showed a-near, and she pressed forward more swiftly. But Life held her back.

"For many years have we been fellow travelers," quoth he, "and though thou hast long wearied of me, yet tarry a moment e'er thou takest the longer turning. I have yet somewhat to show thee."

"Ah! well," said the Woman, "a little more—what matter! Though by the heart that once was mine I trow thou wilt find me somewhat duller than of yore! Make the thing plain then—and brief."

Then spake Life to the Woman: "What seest thou here at the cross-roads?"

And the Woman answered: "I see two shrines, and upon them two figures veiled in white. Why should I tarry for these?"

"Draw now the veils," bade Life, "e'er we say farewell."

Then the Woman raised her hand and lifted the first veil.

"What seest thou now?" asked her companion.

The woman laughed long and bitterly.

"Dost think I have forgotten even the semblance of such?" she cried. "I see *a happy woman!* Even such a

one might I have been myself! What have I done to thee that thou has used me so despitefully? Why hast thou laid this grievous burden on me for all the weary years? Was it for my good?—I trow not! Look at us two—compare us! My eyes were bright as hers—with tears they are quenched! My step was as free—now it drags in chains! For the Joy of Life—behold a woman embittered! I was tender as she—sorrow hath hardened my heart! Behold thy handiwork! Say, was it well done?—Doth it please thee?"

A shadow passed over the face of Life.

"Draw now the other veil," quoth he.

Then the Woman sank on her knees and bowed her head before the awful beauty of the uncovered face. Knowledge was there, and Strength, and boundless Tenderness and Hope. Sorrow had it seen and Tears, yet the eyes burned but with a deeper glow. Patience and Pity were on the lips and Victory sat on the unclouded brow.

Then the Woman whispering asked of Life: "And what may this be?"

"*That which thy sorrow might have made thee*," he replied.

THE SADDEST FATE

MAIDEN

And who are these,
Who walk about in white, with star-lit eyes,
Rapt faces, parted lips?

DEATH

The Brides of Love.

MAIDEN

And these in black who, even 'mid their tears,
Warm their chill hands at Mem'ry's flame and smile?

DEATH

Love's Widows.

MAIDEN

And these last, who, robed in gray,
Nor hope nor recollection in their eyes,
Pass silent on their way? What saddest fate
Was theirs on earth? What part had they with Love?

DEATH

These knew him not.

WAR POEMS

WAR POEMS

TO WILLIAM S. THAYER,

Physician: Soldier: Poet.

To whose help and kindred enthusiasm for the Cause of Justice and Civilization I owe the deep gratification of having my pro-Ally sentiments (in Neutral) go on record in the first months of the Great War, and than whom no one has given—or given up—more for the Cause whereof they treat, these verses are dedicated.

NEUTRAL

"Washington, D. C., *August 5, 1914.*
"Whereas a state of war unhappily exists . . . and whereas the laws and treaties of the United States . . . impose the duty of an impartial neutrality. . . . Therefore"—

"We have no pretext for declaring war."
No pretext—true, but O America!
There is a Cause—thy cause as well as theirs
Who fight thy battles for thee overseas!
Dost thou do well to draw thy garments clear
The while the very things thou standest for
Are trembling in the balance? Shall the earth

Remain the gainer for the centuries
Of toilsome groping upward—Justify
Him, Who created? Shall Democracy,
Gazing men frank and fearless in the eyes,
Still lead her peaceful cohorts down the years
To ever widening freedom? Shall our Chiefs
Be Prophets, Sages, Servers of their kind—
'Gainst pestilence and ignorance our wars—
Our meed of victory—the Common Good?
Or shall the shadow of the Iron Hand
Blacken the earth? Shall Mediaeval night
Engulf our dawn?—Torn from a Lister's hand
The knife goes back to Cain!—shall all we piled,
Stone after stone for painful centuries,
Fall crashing into chaos, while the guns
Roar sullen requiem? Earth an armèd camp—
"Might" once more "right"—O Country of the Free!
Is *this* no cause of thine?
And think not that thyself shalt so escape!
The ashes of Louvain that cry to God,
The blood of "neutral Belgium," falling bomb,
And floating death that blocks the ocean lanes,
With treaties violate and oaths forsworn
Bear ominous witness to that Prophet Voice:
"Thou art the next in line!" Look, look beyond!
As *he* had looked, who gave that liberty
Thou dost imperil, Judge as he, then rise
As he, far-sighted, wise, deliberate,
Were he on earth to-day would bid thee rise!
Unfurl the silver stars!—unsheathe the sword!

And *by the spirit of thy Washington*
Join hands with England! Up! then—Not in hate,
And with no shout of martial ecstasy,
But in the name of Him, the Prince of Peace,
Whose kingdom totters—stern and sorrowful,
Facing the issue—while the balance sways—
To arms! Columbia!—Lest a world be lost!

Foot Note:

Written August 8, 1914 and published shortly thereafter in England under the title: "Join Hands with England!"

"ON EXHIBITION: CARTOONS OF LOUIS RAEMAEKERS"

(*From an incident at the Baltimore "Exhibit of War Posters," March, 1916.*)

In furs and velvets clad, she bends her head
Above the page, where writ in tears and blood,
A later Prophet wails a later woe:
Scourges a later sin, and, unafraid,
Lays bare the grim Entirety of War.

Between her jeweled fingers, see! there leers
A purple Devil at the feet of Him
They crucify anew.
The bubbles rise
From ghastly shapes that slowly through the gloom
Seek ocean's floor—the Sea-Mine's "dividends!"

The dread Green Serpent sends his poisoned breath
Adown the wind. The sleepers dream of Home
And wake to Horror! Countless wounded men,
Who cannot flee, lie helpless in its path
To die a death unspeakable!
Here yawns
A trench—the village church-yard is so small—
And on its brink a patient figure stands,
And weeps slow patient tears, while to his breast,

With toil-worn hands, he clasps his latest work—
A small unpainted coffin: "Yesterday
Their bombs flew wide, but later they have killed
My dear wife and my little Tineke."

Fill up the trench! Dig, dig one deeper yet—
So deep that Shame be buried!—Lay therein
The Mem'ry of that day—a piteous "shield!"—
"Women and priests," before th' advancing foe
Were driven, whom their own must slay or leave
Unstemmed the tide of steel that rolled behind!

And ever plaintive 'mid the hell of war,
The groans, the shouts, the tumult and the hate,
Rises the question of the Belgian child:
"*Father, what have we done?*"
She closed the book—
She "could not bear to see them all!" she said,
Murmured a word of pity—one of thanks
"We too" were "not entangled in the war!"
And passed to other matters.
And shall we
Close the book likewise?—close our hearts and ears
To Wrong, because that Wrong is far away?
To Woe that waileth in another tongue?

To Brother's Blood that, from an unseen ground,
Crieth, and answer the dread Questioner:
"Are *we* his keeper? Lo! we keep ourselves!"

Forbid it Lord!—Lest at the last we see
The pinnacle whereon we might have stood—
Our torch so high above the clouds of strife
Its calm and steady light had lit the world—
A Beacon to the Ages! Were there need
Of blood to feed its radiance—to have bled!—
What time we sat and warmed us at the fire!

Is there no turning? Shall we see but when—
Too late the Vision!—all aghast we stand
Beside th' unspoken Word—the still-born Deed,
And—all too late!—send up our wail to Heaven:
"*Father, what have we done!*"

BARRED ZONES

"BERLIN, *January, 1917.*
On and after February 1st.....Barred Zones."

Above the booming of the guns,
The wailing of the desolate,
Again it falls with sullen clang—
The gauntlet from the Hand of Hate!

The hope of many months is past—
The veil before our eyes is rent—
And, driven to the wall at last,
We wait the blow we must resent!

O Ye! who, like to them of old,
Entered the fire and found your God,
We ne'er may claim the crown ye wear,
Who dared not tread the path ye trod!

Yet, hounded, driven, forced to fight,
In this at least we keep us clean—
Nor explanation nor excuse
Shall further smirch the Might-Have-Been!

Silent, we range us with our peers,
But, as the serried ranks are set,
Stern, strong and bitter let it rise—
The Litany of our Regret:

"As Peter, who denied his Lord,
  Yet after—weeping bitterly—
  Took up the Cross—we take the Sword
  And turn at last O Lord! to Thee.

"Lord, we have sinned and turned aside,
Followed each man his own desire,
Heard Thee re-sentenced: "Crucified!"
The whiles we warmed us at the fire!

"We spoke no word in Belgium's need,
  The crimes that left a world aghast
Escaped our protest—Lord, indeed,
  We are not proud of what is past!

"Yet it may be when, face to face,
  We meet the foe in deadly fight,
It may be proven—by Thy grace—
  That men ashamed are strong to smite!

"No blood can e'er wipe out the past—
  We face the shame—we own the sin—
Yet to Thy standard, Lord, at last
  We call our legions now—
Fall in!"

EASTER 1918

The Voice
from the Chancel:

Scene, a great church
"Somewhere in America."

"Easter this day means more than e'er before!
The whiles, through blood and war,
The Easter dawn steals slowly up the skies—
Lift, lift your eyes!
Above the anguished earth to where your dead—
Your peaceful dead!—abide in Heaven secure.
This is their day! Yea! and I hold it sure
If that ye ask believing, in this hour
He, Who hath power,
Will send your message through—Speak to your own!—
They love no less than ye, and e'en in Heaven
Will joy at your remembrance! Comfort ye!
In commune with your dead, who have not died!"

In the deep hush that followed, o'er my soul
I felt the waters roll!
"And is 'our own' the goal of every thought?
And seek we comforting so soon?" I said,
"Whose hearts have barely bled?"
Then straightway up to Heaven
My cry went forth: "Lord, if indeed 'tis given
To send a message through this Eastertide
To those, who with Thee bide—

Take mine! It beats against Thy pearly gate
With hands importunate
Its heart a flame!

Admit! Receive it! Bear it to my dead!
Yet neither kith nor kin
Hath any share therein,
Friend, Father, sister, Mother, nor the man
Who smiled and breathed my name, and smiling died—
All these I put aside
For simple peasant men, whose toil-worn hands
Flung down the spade to draw the sword for France:
For swarthy miners from the pits of Wales:
For fresh-faced English lads: For serried ranks
Of bronzed Colonials: For—be Thine the praise!—
That handful of our own! For dusky hordes,
Who knew Thee not, 'til, silent with amaze,
They heard high Heaven acclaim them conquerors,
Who perished in Thy Cause—and in each mind
"Sudden a great light shined!"

This is no Easter of the "peaceful dead!"
In tattered garb and red
The wonder still unfaded in their eyes
Beneath the dented helmets, line on line
They pass, 'twixt silent ranks of Seraphim,
They pass! And heaven re-echoes to the tread
Of the new-drafted hosts of Paradise!

Lord! if a message pass from earth to Heaven,
These be my dead!

"FOR DURATION"

(Spring, 1918)

The whiles you labor greatly overseas,
I grudge no pain of body or of soul
That speeds my lesser task, but ah! Beloved!
While skies shine blue and woods are filled with song
And snowy petals drift adown the wind—
With tender hands my chiefest sacrifice
I lay upon the altar—Thoughts of thee,
Which I must leave unthought an I would give
Full service!
Fot the days are ah! so short!
And thoughts of thee so long! There is no space
In the world now-a-days for dreams and war!
And I too am a soldier!
One last thought
To fold thee close, close! e'er I bury deep
Thy mem'ry in my heart, quiet and still
To lie 'til Peace or Death shall summon it
To Resurrection!

QUENTIN

July 14, 1918.

Such cannot die!
The man-made wings may fail,
The mortal frame cease to endure, but still
On flaming pinions circling o'er the field
He keeps his vanward post!
O Youth and Hope!
Courage and Sacrifice and Nobleness!
Ye are not wasted! Though no son shall own
The dower of thy deeds—a Nation's heart
Heirs them!
Yea! we fight better for the thought
Of those bright Dead, whom thou hast joined to-day—
The brave young Dead!—who have not left the fight,
But, being transferred by the High Command,
Wheel in angelic squadrons o'er the fray
And call us—radiant, strong and militant!—
Still to press on!

THE GREATER LOSS

(*An incident of the influenza epidemic*)

We sat in the Nurses' Home,
And we talked there under our breath,
Not of the Three, who had died that week,
But the One, who had turned from Death!

Turned, when the need was sore,
To the Love we had put aside—
While a stricken city called for aid
To choose her garb as a bride!

Then—facing the task she left!
Each sought her post through the gloom,
With a lifted head
At the thought of our Dead,
But—with whispers we passed her room!

AFTER PLATO

Overseas Orders, *October, '17*).

Then I whispered: "Poor Robert!" He answered: "Nay, Robert the Happy the Blest!
That thy head, though in pity, a moment, at last on his shoulder finds rest!—
My Love for thy Friendship—what matter!—Thy gift is the greater , as thou
Hast e'er to my Earth been the Heaven.—*Dear Heart! It must be good-bye now!*"—
Crushed me close to his breast for a moment: Softly kissed my wet eyelids and hair:
Then the door was flung wide to the tempest. He was gone! And I stood alone there
And I watched the storm rage through the darkness ere back to the sheltering room
I stole softly and took my old seat there by the hearth, but the wavering red plume
Of the fire had faded to ashes. I sighed and I rose to depart.
When, through their white cov'ring there leapt up, swift, straight, from its long-buried heart
A clear tongue of flame, and I stood there, and marveled —what could it portend?—
Watched it shine, flicker, die; then in darkness climbed the stairs: knelt and prayed—*for a friend!*

(Meuse–Argone, *October, '18*).

Oh! arms that are folded above the cross pinned on thy breast!
Oh! lips, whose long pleadings are stilled in the smile of long rest!—
Oh! Heart of my Heart!—
I have learned it!—
The lesson thy presence could never impart.
Yet I say not: "Too late!" but "How long?" for my lips shall repeat
That lesson thine absence hath taught me when—ah!—when we meet
In that Heaven thy deeds have made fairer, yet even the bliss
Thou hast found there I know I can heighten by whisp'r-ing thee this:
To the clasp of those arms I endured for the sake of a friend
Flies my heart for its comfort—dear arms!—to find ample amend
For the griefs of the day! And the tears on my lashes are dried
By the mem'ry of kisses that thrilled not—until thou hadst died!
Lo! my head rests once more on thy shoulder and utter content

Fills my being 'till dawning—when sudden the Vision is rent—!
Yet night cometh once more! Thou wilt come to me, comfort once more!
So I fear not the waste years behind, not the long years before,
Since we face them together!
O Flame! from the ashes that sped!—
Brighter far, stronger far, soars the flame from my long-buried heart—
Yea, undying! which, though by a still and a cold hand 'twas lit,
Proveth Love is not dead!

THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA ANSWERS

"BERLIN, *October, '18*

Negotiations . . . preparatory to Peace.
Solf."

What Spirit thought they to have conjured forth
Out of the West—with crash of falling walls
And roar of guns and shriek of Tortured Things?—
Some meek-browed Peace to help condone the Past
For fear of Present Agony? Ah! no!
Not so the Spirit it hath dared evoke
Confronts the Beast!—The Soul of the New World
In mud-caked khaki, crowned with dented steel,
Crouches to spring! Dim, through the drifting smoke,
The stern young face, with horror in the eyes
At viewing Evil it had ne'er conceived,

The grim young mouth that needs no words to speak
That Evil's sentence!—
Full of Subtilty!
And Enemy of Righteousness! What hope
Hadst thou to serve thy purposes with *This?*

America speaks:
"Tell me, my Soul, what answer shall we send
Unto the Subtle-Tongued, who speaks again?"

Spirit of America:
"*What we have sent!*
From Flanders to Argonne
We write our answer on the lurid sky:
Hurl it in iron and thunder 'gainst his hosts:
Drive it in rivets in ten thousand ships:
Spray it in gold barrages through our Loans:
Cheer on our women to the work we left—
Who cheer us as we leave—
For well they know
The deadly rattle of the mitrailleuse:
The shriek of shell: the bullet's vicious "ping!"
The crack of Colt: the bay'net's sick'ning thud—
Are yet *clean* things, to rid an outraged World
Of wrongs unspeakable!
Yea! we shall smite
'Til they, who ringed this new Golgotha 'round
With bands of steel, and mocked at That that died,
See "a great darkness" creeping o'er their sun—
That sets forever!—feel the blackened earth
Quake 'neath avenging hosts, where Might and Right
Join hands at last!—to hurl the Outlaw forth!

Yet—ask they still for words, who keep no word!—
This then the answer of America—
America at war!—From sheltered homes
And wreck-strewn waves, and blood-soaked fields of France:
"Lo!" "we are here!" And, with the hosts Allied,
Shoulder to shoulder we will see it through,

To the last man—to the last hour of time—
"The utmost limit!"
'Til the Hand of God
Hath writ his Mene Tekel on Berlin!"

VICTORY!

Then came a runner to Athens from Marathon and he cried out: "Rejoice! We conquer!"

(At the French Symphony Orchestra.)
"*Armageddon is fought and won—*
Fought and won for the Lord to-day!"
Jubilant bell and roaring gun
Follow the Word on its wondrous way!
See them thronging the flag-decked space—
Father and Mother, child and wife—
Tear-wet eye and transfigured face,
Greeting the Crowning Day of Life!

"*What do they say?*" *It is not clear.*
"*What is the music?*" *I do not hear!*

Still you deem me and cold perchance—
Ah! but my soul is far away!
How, having bled four years in France,
Could it be be absent on this Day?
Turn your face to the East with me
See the Vision my eyes can see!

Here is Victory Celebrate,
But I gaze on Victory Incarnate:—

Swirling up from a war-scarred plain—
O Flanders Fields! we have kept the Faith!—
Souls exultant the news proclaim!
Gone the bound'ries 'twixt Life and Death—
Mud-caked men by the cooling guns
Swing their steel hats up in the air—
Up, where the New-Dead pause to greet
The End they died for!—e'er on they fare:
Up! through a smother of rushing wings,
High and higher the whirlwind goes
Through Blinding Glories, 'til prone we fall
And hide our eyes at the Journey's Close!—
Hide our eyes, but we yet can hear
The mingled Chorus of Earth and Sky
The stern "Hurrah!" of the fighting men,
The crash of Heavenly melody:—
"Alleluia!"—
Silver trumpet and angel voice:—
"The earth is the Lord's! Rejoice! rejoice!
"Alleluia! Alleluia!
"For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

SONGS OF THE LONG TRAIL

To my "Collaborator"

SONGS OF THE LONG TRAIL

LAS COSAS CONCRETAS

"Por nosotros—las cosas concretas."
"For us—concrete (material) things."
Chilean saying.

"Si tu pienses bastante, tus pensamientos viajarian muy lejos."

"If thou thinkest long enough, thy thoughts will travel far."

On Christmas morn e'er break of day,
In solemn gladness o'er the snow,
With frost-bright stars to light the way,
The happy people church-ward go.

The sweetest time of all the year,
When Home and Heaven are closest drawn,
Our own grow even yet more dear,
Because this day a Child was born.

Yet, while each household kneels to pray
Within some mem'ry-hallowed spot,

My thoughts are far and far away
With those the others have forgot.

. . . . . .

Far scattered o'er the Seven Seas,
The Arctic moon, the Tropic sun,
Shine on their vent'rous argosies,
Or check the line their levels run:

From East to West the Silent Lands
Have echoed to their lonely feet,
Who blaze the Trail with bleeding hands—
The Trail that marks the Future Street!

High o'er the clouds their girders spring,
Where wind-swept wastes breathe deadly chill:
The distant rivers boom and sing,
Bitted and bridled to their will:

'Neath molten skies, 'mid steaming rains—
Heat-parched, light-dazzled, lean and brown—
Tongue hath not sung those grim campaigns—
The spoils of war—a plague-rid town!

Safe held within their steady hands
The World's Work rests—they crave no meed
Of Fame or Fortune—their demands—
The Power and Chance to do the Deed!

. . . . . .

So most of all at Christmas time
I think my thoughts for men forgot,

Where happy carols upward chime
  In mem'ry-hallowed spot.

And most of all at Christmas time
  I pray my prayers for men away—
For lonely men, who have forgot
  It may be even words to pray—
  Or that 'tis Christmas Day!

O! guard them safe and keep them true
  To labor in each high emprise
And let Thy Love enfold them too—
So helpless mine!—yet may it do
  To kiss their sleeping eyes:
That stern-set lips may smile in dreams
  Of long past Christmases!

To all Builders, but especially the Andean Engineers.

BUILDERS

"Benedicite, omnia opera Domini!"
"O all ye works . . . bless ye the Lord!"
(*Song of the Three Children*)

Lo! here is a Joy for Christmas-tide—
The joy of the hearth-fire burning,
And the home-cheer
And the home-love
And the home-stars overhead,
But it takes no whit
From the best of it
That we see, in the midst of the burning,
The stress and strain
Of the past again
Through the ways where the Long Trail led!

So here is a Thought for Christmas-tide
Of lands that were helped in the making,
Of hard lands,
Of high lands
Of ceaseless wind and cold:
By the llama trail
Winds the polished rail—

Oh! the pain and the joy of the making!—
And the camp was there
In the Central Square
When the levels were run of old!

And here is a Blessing for Christmas-tide,
That whosoever hath builded,
With clean hands,
With high heart,
For love of the Thing he wrought
With steel or pen
Or the souls of men—
They are Divers Things that are builded!—
A gift doth bring
To the Christmas King
As the gold and the myrrh were brought!

THE CALL

Oh! we speak the tongue of our exile now
With never an accent slurred,
We've donned the yoke
Of the City-Folk
Nor differ in deed or word;
We tread the streets with a townsman's tread—
Yea! we pass our brethren by—
For how can we tell that the "White Wings" there
And the silk-clad girl with the well-coiffed hair
Are exiles too, since we may not share
The soul's identity?

How can we tell? O'er the roaring street
Let the long hoarse call be heard
Of a wave-beat liner creeping in,
Then, out from the midst of the crowd and din,
Stands the list'ning face of each soul akin—
Yon was a Master Word!

The Word that comes in the Mother Tongue,
That carries us back again
To the glad free life of the Open Skies
That doth test the souls of men,
Our hair is stirred by a breeze long dead,
By the light of a long dead Day
The sea unrolls at our feet once more

In a glory of wind and spray!
Then—the Vision breaks as a bubble breaks—
We are back on the Straightened Way!

Oh! we serve the Land of our Exile well—
More well than her sons can serve!—
By a simpler code of a truer life,
With a steadier brain and nerve:
The self-restraint that a Wood-Folk taught
Hath added strength to our zeal,
And the Deed that treads on the heels of Thought
Was learnt at a storm-wrenched wheel!
Yea! we bring our gifts with an open hand,
We have closed the door of the Past,
Since our way lies over the city streets
We'll tread it straight to the last!
But—grudge no thought of that Other Life,
Nor chide the Call of the Sea,
For we serve ye better—O Sheltered Folk!—
For rememb'ring—we once were free!

THE CALL (2)

Scene, a busy street. The hoarse call of an incoming steamer rises above the din of traffic.

Girl:

Oh! world of sparkle and space and foam,
That the Call brings back to me!
Oh! wind and water and cloud and sky—
My heart flies back as the wild gulls fly,
Where the Trades roar loud and the waves roll high—
To the blue Caribbean Sea!

. . . . . .

Oh! they praise my eyes and they praise my hair,
And they praise the cut of my gown,
My "charm" and my manner of serving tea,
But—what would they say to the real "Me!"—
The Sons of the Shut-In-Town!

They hedge me 'round with observances,
They would stifle the air with flowers!
But mark! The top of my pedastal
Must give no view o'er the garden wall—
I must share but their leisure hours!

I! who would stand at the top o' the world,
With a Comrade by my side,
And laugh at the force of the tempest's breath
E'er, with level glances of Trust and Faith
And sharing the burden of Life and Death,
We plunged where the Trail-heads hide!

Oh! the Trail may end in a palm-thatched hut,
Or back in the village street,
But if ever the chart is rightly scanned,
You'il find it ends at the Promised Land
Where the Lore we learned and the Good we planned
And the Chance of Fulfilment meet!

. . . . . .

But—I must dwell in the Shut-In-Town—
Whose soul is a bird at sea!—
While, fashioned alike from top to toe,
The Sons of the Town pass to and fro—
Is there never a one who can know—can know!
Of the Thing that is calling me!

Man:

Oh! the gray sea!
The *lift* of the great Atlantic swell
And the cold gray mist in the face—
The gray wrack scudding across the sky
A flash of wings and a wild gull's cry,
And the turbine's throbbing race!

Over the dim horizon's edge—
Over the rim of the sea—
Worlds lie waiting the Shaping Hand—
Days to gild what the Midnight planned—
But first to be simply free!

. . . . . .

I had thought that a woman might understand—
Let us put the mem'ry by!—
Dream of a boy for a Dream—ah! no—
The women we mate with are not so!
'Round the Safe and the Near their heart-
strings grow—
They would clip the wings to fly!

But clipt or folded they yet will stir
When the Call comes over the Bay—
Ah! sweeter than fire-lit ease would be
A plunging deck on a cold gray sea!
And the kiss of my First Love bides with me—
The cold salt kiss of the spray!

Street Cleaner:

They told me this was a better place—
An' o' course its better pay—
But what is a dollar now an' then
When it comes a question o' sailor-men
An' you hear a ship in th' Bay?

I got no kick at th' City-folks—
They give me a decent deal—
But I'd give my shovel an' six months pay
To be steerin' that vessel up the Bay—
To feel my hand on her wheel!

An' I'd give six more to steer her out
In the teeth of a nor'east gale,
As her bows crash down through the inky sea—
With her riggin' singin' a song to me,
An' the lantern shinin' pale!

. . . . . .

In the Seaman's Bethel they spin a yarn
Of a guy an' a swapped birth-right—
Look out Mister! You'll wet your shoes!—
You was lis'nin' too?—Then it won't be news—
I'm shippin' again to-night!

THE FOOL DIETH

SCENE: *A dungeon. Night. Beppo, the fool, having changed garments with the king, now awaits execution in his master's stead.*

(*Sings:*)

"*When the Devil lately went*
To the heav'nly Parliament.
Angel fingers all with praise
Point to Job his perfect ways:
"*Ancient Evil, even thou*
Must his righteousness allow!"—

(*Speaks:*)

Heaven and hell, good Beppo, Heaven and hell!
Thy mind runs strangely on these matters—Zounds!
In sober foolishness 'tis strange how words
Once lightly spoke like curses come to roost
When least we want 'em! "*Tempus fugit*"—faith
We quote with smiles at twenty—being fools!
Sigh it at forty---being fools the more
Since sighing mends naught—yet for our own selves
Believe it not 'til when Sir Dry-Bones knocks
'Tis *fugit* with a vengeance! What are words?
Or who in youth conceives an end to life?—
Life! (*Muses*)

(*Rouses himself*)

(*Sings*)

"*Skin for skin*," *the Devil said,*
Hid a smile and turned his head,
"*Land and honor, child and wife*
Will a man give for his life!
Clinging kisses, lustrous eyes
Bootless when remembrance dies!"

How cold it is! Phew! Cousin Charles may keep
His toes warm running o'er the country side!
My cap and bells to see him, when in sooth
A must for once acknowledged play the fool!
I have him there! But then he has me—here!

(*Hums again:*)

"Clinging kisses, lustrous eyes
Bootless when remembrance dies!"

"Remembrance!"—Doth she weep for him to-night?
Aie!—Wherefore should I dream that she doth weep?
She who was formed for laughter and for love!
She, who was fashioned—

(*Enter Princess and Jailor*)

JAILOR: Madam, by your leave
The king is yonder. Had I but my will

Ye'd speak alone. My orders were to watch—
Naught about list'ning—so I'll take my stand
Where I can hear least. 'Tis an hour to dawn.

PRINCESS: Kind Heaven! An hour!

JAILOR: The guard was changed but now.

PRINCESS: (Moves forward and stands behind him) Charles!

BEPPO: Who doth call on Charles? 'Tis something late
For asking aught of Carlos!

PRINCESS: (Softly) Beppo!

BEPPO: God!
You here! *You!* Are you thing of flesh and blood?
Or can the parting soul make tangible
The Thing it cries on? Can the tortured heart
Imprint i' the air a last—(Recovering himself) I crave your grace!
You took me, Highness, somewhat by surprise—
My wits a-wandering—

PRINCESS: Wherefore then surprised?
Thou didst not think I would not say farewell?

BEPPO: (grimly) True, I forgot! It had looked passing strange,
With the betrothal scarce a fortnight old—
Nay speak not! There is naught to be explained!
You needs must come and, also, being come
Must play the drama to a fitting close. (Looking at her meaningly)
Necessity, the Prompter, takes his stand,
The roles are clearly writ, the curtain stirs,
The Audience attentive, though remote,

Hangs on each look. Hast courage for the part?

PRINCESS: (Returning his glance gravely) Who could be coward here?

BEPPO: (Moved) My accolade! (Pause)
Sweet! (Aside) Pardon, 'tis your cue! The Audience
Waxes impatient—thinks us somewhat cold—(Aloud)
Sweet, grieve not at the fate that hastens on—
It lacks an hour!—an hour filled with thee!
The world shut out! Ah! mad, sweet, tender hour!
Believe me, here upon this block of stone
With thee beside me, I am high enthroned
Above the kings of earth! Upon that soul,
Which bears thy seal and hence may win to Heaven,
I swear this hour amendment makes for all
Here and hereafter! Ah! the parting hour!
Is there another half so painful sweet?
The sails are set, the music's in the prow,
The cable's slipping, slipping and the tide
Is lapping, lapping! Oh! the sad black tide,
The deep black tide that soon will tear apart
Encircling arms, as stately, calm and slow
The ship moves off: Oblivion's waters roll
Between, and thin and faint and far away
The music.

PRINCESS: On the deep of Memory
Thy barque shall float, and, echoed in one heart,
The music live forever!—Thou are pale!

BEPPO: 'Tis but the flick'ring light. (Aside) Beshrew my heart!
I had forgot that she must answer thus!

PRINCESS: 'Tis not the light!—you suffer! Why your hand
Is ice!—This cloak—

BEPPO: An extra hour a-cold
What matter? (Princess covers face with hands) Oh!
my dear, my dear! my dear!
Forgive me!—Brute to vex thee with such words!—
Nor heed!—Nay, on my shoulder rest thy head
And cease to weep—it will not hurt!—'twill soon
Be over—past and over!—There, there child!

(Sings)

Poor little child, thine eyes with tears o'erflowing,
Dear little child! thou weepest, never knowing—
Comfort thee child!—that children soon forget!

Brave little child, who thought to cheer my sorrow,
Sweet little child, I thank thee!—and to-morrow
Shall I thank God for that thou canst forget!

We also, child, though long our night of weeping
Yet at the last comes rest and quiet sleeping—
Our comfort child! We also shall forget! *(She stirs)*

Ah! do not move yet, that that golden tress,
Which strays across my heart may warm it through!
So that in time to come, when dust to dust
Shall crumble, still that heart alive and warm
Shall pulsate in the ashes—being lit
At so divine a flame! (Pause)

PRINCESS: I would not have thee die!
BEPPO: Death! What is death?
True love can never die, for, look you! life
Is measured by intensity, not years,
And your true lover in one moment's bliss
Hath compassed all eternity. Ah! no,
Helen yet lives because she lived to th' full
Her span o' life. True love can never die!

(*Sings*)

True love can never die, the cowslips blowing,
The blue-eyed vi'lets all the fields o'erflowing,
The daffydils, the primrose, golden-sweet!
The snowdrops springing 'neath thy loved feet—
All these are tokens sent to show thee why
True love can never die!

True love can never die, dost thou remember
How cold and bleak the world was last December?
Yet 'neath the snow the blossoms did but sleep
More fair to grow: Though all things seemed to weep,
Yet read I promise in the leaden sky:
"*True love can never die!*"

Believe it! Do not think of me as dead—
Or rather, do not think of me at all,
If pain comes with remembrance! On my heart!—
Thy heart!—I'll do remembering for both!

PRINCESS: Peace! Could I then forget thee? Ah! such love—
Undreamed of save in dreams! I did not know
It yesterday—To-morrow is too late!
BEPPO: Nay, grieve not for these barren yesterdays
And dead to-morrows—they are for the world!
What matter? We'd an hour all our own—
One hour on earth, perfected, full, complete!
And much I doubt if Peter at the gate
Can show another such to tempt me in!
PRINCESS: Ah! hush, nor tempt the future now so close!
My prayers—
BEPPO: (Meaningly) An I were not a king in Heaven?
Or if another king more worshipful
Should claim—*Do earth's betrothals hold in Heaven?*
Who on uncertainty would stake his all?
And so, dear Saint, pray only that I sleep,
And dream and dream, such dreams that the last trump
Shall rouse me but enow to make me turn
And dream o't'other side; so dreaming on
To all eternity—that's Heaven indeed! (Bell tolls)
JAILOR: Madam, I rede ye, make your parting brief.
They come to take him.
BEPPO: So! The play is done!
Exeunt omnes! I have played a part
Indiff'rent well. I prithee tell him that
I did not all disgrace him.
PRINCESS: On my soul!
Thou'rt more than kingly!

BEPPO: Oh! my more than queen!
Thou dost forgive for Art's sake—players we—
And now the curtain! Over short my role!
PRINCESS: And mine is over long!—Dear God!—how long!
BEPPO: (Unsteadily) The climax! See our Audience wipe his eye!
Bravo! (Taking her hand) And may I kiss it e'er we part?
(She raises quivering lips)
God's love! (Kisses her) Farewell, most dear, most brave, most sweet!
One little prayer, remember, that I sleep,
And dream—do not forget the dreams!—Farewell!

Finis

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